



World Chronicle

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Between the early 1980's and mid-1990's, the number of humanitarian crises escalated from an average of 20-25 to about 65-70 a year. The International Red Cross now estimates that the number of persons involved is increasing by about ten million annually. As a result, scores of people have been left dead, starving displaced, homeless and hopeless, while many others could be affected in the not too distant future unless preventive corrective measures are urgently introduced. In this edition of **World Chronicle**, Frances Stewart, Project Director of the United Nations University's WIDER Project, discusses the root cause of complex humanitarian emergencies.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

The number of people affected by humanitarian crises has risen considerably over the past years. Millions have been left starving, displaced, homeless and hopeless, while many others could be affected unless preventive corrective measures are introduced. Complex humanitarian emergencies are particularly difficult to tackle and are a serious threat to human security. The United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research, in collaboration with the Queen Elizabeth House, has recently completed a research project entitled "The Wave of Emergencies of the Last Decade: Causes, Extent, Predictability and Response". The project focuses on the root cause of complex humanitarian emergencies.

Our guest today was involved in coordinating this project. She is Professor Frances Stewart, a board member of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. Joining me to talk with Professor Stewart is James Wurst of *In These Times* and Thalif Deen of *InterPress Service*.

Professor Stewart, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

STEWART: Thank you very much.

LITTLEJOHNS: For starters, Professor, tell us a bit about the project and how it's funded and what you do and how did you get into it and precisely what are these complex humanitarian crises, CHE? Complex Humanitarian Emergencies I think is what you call them.

STEWART: That's right.

LITTLEJOHNS: Why are these different from any other type of emergency? Anyway these are questions if you like to cover that ground.

STEWART: Well the project has been going on three years. It's quite a big programme. Contains an international team, multi-disciplinary – economists, political scientists, anthropologists – all working on it.

LITTLEJOHNS: And based at Oxford University?

STEWART: Based partly at Oxford University and partly in Helsinki where WIDER, the World Institute for Development Economic Research, is based and jointly sponsored by the two institutes. I, myself, am the Director of the Research Institute in Oxford University.

LITTLEJOHNS: Is this an offshoot of the United Nations University? In the introduction we referred to the UN University.

STEWART: UN University/WIDER is part of the UN University family and we are just Oxford University with good relations with the UN University. The point, as I think you made in your introduction, is that CHE – Complex Humanitarian Emergencies – have been growing at the most alarming rate over recent years, particularly over the last two decades. They are called complex because they have a number of different things going on. Political crises – usually it's a question of power, attempts to control the state – rebellions, violence fighting – but also human tragedies caused not so much by the fighting but by the economic consequences – famine, lack of food, forcing people to flee. Refugees caused by political violence and also by lack of economic subsistence. Having to move in to refugee camps, disease among children, lack of nutrition. It's a whole complex of events. They're complicated, the international response is complicated, and for these reasons they're called Complex Humanitarian Emergencies. They're causing such a lot of human tragedies that in a way they are the single most important cause of under-development today. Anyone who is interested in developing the world economy, I think, has to be interested in them as a first priority because they are really the place where developments failed and that's how I came into it as a development economist. I thought it was such a key issue and that's also why WIDER also got into the same subject.

LITTLEJOHNS: Do you present blueprints for dealing with these problems? We talk about preventive corrective measures what sort of preventive corrective measures can you produce?

STEWART: Well, we have to understand them first and that the main point of the project is to understand them and what we see them as is essentially battles between

groups of people. People organize themselves into groups in accordance with their culture, their perceived ethnicity, their perceived class, their perceived clans.

LITTLEJOHNS: Religion also?

STEWART: Sometimes religion as in Northern Ireland and there are these differences but there are differences among many people. That does not necessarily by itself cause conflict, you have to have some other factors present. And what we're finding in this project is not so much that we can definitely say these are the factors which definitely cause emergencies but we can say these are the factors which are likely to cause emergencies. And the factors are: first there are cultural differences but secondly, there are economic, social and political differences among the groups. We describe this as horizontal inequality; that is some groups are hogging all the political power, all the economic resources or a large proportion of them, the education and so on. The big difference in all indicators one can find between groups is horizontal inequality, so that's another feature. In most societies we also find that there are low and stagnant incomes so when you find a combination of these four factors – cultural differences, horizontal inequality, particularly if there is a past record of violence, plus economic stagnation – you have a very vulnerable situation. So then you say, what are the policies? Well, policies really emerge out of this diagnosis of the problem and the policies, above all, are to try and correct the horizontal inequalities, try and bring all of a population, members of different groups, into the political system and into the economic system and into the social system.

LITTLEJOHNS: Do governments and groups pay attention to your recommendations?

STEWART: Well, of course, we're only launching our recommendations today. We hope they will but you've touched on a very important problem because one of the findings, which is of course not very surprising, is that governments very often are the problem not the solution at the moment. Much of the violence is caused by governments, instigated by governments. You'll find Iraq, you'll find Cambodia, we can go on. And so we're having to try and find a solution in a situation that is very difficult because the political problem has to be dealt with.

DEEN: Professor Stewart, as you know, there are several UN agencies which are involved in humanitarian operations and some of them complain that a good part of their resources are being increasingly diverted from long-term economic development into emergency situations. Do you get a sense of this happening?

STEWART: I think it is definitely happening. If you look at the data – and of course, in a sense, once the emergency happened it's compelling that you should direct some resources to these people who are suffering more than anyone else in the world – but I think what is needed is to spend more of the development aid in a preventative way so the emergencies don't happen. So I think we need to revise the way we distribute and organize a lot of our development aid to direct it towards vulnerable societies, not societies which are already in crisis but vulnerable ones, and to do it in such a way that you try and correct these inequalities and try and correct the underdevelopment which will otherwise lead to an emergency.

WURST: Do you think the UN is doing this?

STEWART: The UN doesn't play such a huge role in the development side. It's playing a big role in the emergency side. I think the World Bank and the IMF play a bigger role in the economic side and they are not doing that in my view. In fact, it's not that they are deliberately not doing it, they are just ignoring these issues. They're going ahead with their normal business. They distribute resources according to efficiency and according to how they think stabilization should happen. Very often this is in conflict with what ought to happen in terms of preventing an emergency. For example, in Rwanda, Rwanda received a large amount of aid from a number of different bilateral and multilateral donors in the years before the emergency. Nobody made any effort, any serious effort, to see that that aid was distributed well, that some of the inequities were being corrected, and so on. So in a sense it fed the crisis instead of trying to correct it. So I think the international community, particularly the World Bank, IMF and even aid donors – the bilaterals – are blind to these issues. They're not really taking them into account when they distribute their aid and I think one could improve the situation significantly if one did.

WURST: So then how do you convince the aid agencies, international

organizations, etc., to do this sort of thing because as you pointed out they don't do it. They've done in fact the exact reverse. They go for military aid rather than development aid, they deal with emergencies rather than long-term development. If Rwanda did not teach us that you have to follow-up what's happening to your aid then how are you going to convince them that anything could be done?

STEWART: I sort of feel that it's easier to convince the international donors than it is sometimes the governments but my reading is that certainly the World Bank is more open to small suggestions than it used to be on this front. It's beginning to do much more work and it's listening to a certain extent. So I think what one has to do is just make the message very loud and clear but we haven't gotten

LITTLEJOHNS: It has become more socially conscious?

STEWART: It has become more socially conscious but it hasn't had all that much effect on the ground but it has began to listen a bit more than it used to. And I mean this particular programme of course has just come to an end and we're now beginning to talk to different people about it. But I think a lot of the aid donors are interested, at least, with part of what – I mean aid has many motives. Partly it's got political motives, partly it's got economic motives and partly it's got humanitarian motives but with their humanitarian ear they may be listening to this message.

WURST: One of the actors that always comes up in international affairs generally, not necessarily development aid, and that you have not talked about is the private sector. You know, international capital, etc. What kind of role is possible for what has become **the** major source of wealth in the world?

STEWART: I think that's a very key and difficult issue. You can get the private sector to behave in a way that is supportive of integration and I think in some societies they recognize this and do work in that way. For example in Malaysia, the government led an effort to try and get fairness between races in Malaysia. Extremely successful. And the private sector went along with that and it's really had a very good result. I think in South Africa where there is again a very extreme case, the private sector has been supportive of attempts to broaden out the racial composition but government had to take the lead. I

think in Northern Ireland the private sector is playing a productive role in opening up opportunities for Catholics which is easing the situation. So potentially, the private sector will play a role but not unless it's pushed by governments or by the international community. It is not going to do it by itself but I think that, of course, the longer-term interest of the private sector is peace. They're not going to make any money in the long run except the arms industry.

DEEN: I was wondering whether you have dealt with the political problem that arises out of these complex emergency situations. For example, there are certain countries which say that even if they have a humanitarian emergency in their country no UN agency or NGO can enter the country without the express permission of the government because it involves an issue of national sovereignty. I think they have the right to go into a country in a situation like that.

STEWART: Well that raises very important issues of sovereignty. My own view, and this is not really so much the project, but my own view, is there are conditions in which human rights are being violated where outsiders have the right to go in and I think that is being increasingly recognized by the international community. Most of the countries that we looked at they didn't prevent NGOs going in. It's very often difficult to work with the governments. It's best to work with governments because governments are much more comprehensive and the governments which do attempt to, for example, feed their own people are much more effective than doing it only through the NGOs. Mozambique is a case where the government really did try and get food supplies to everybody even during the war. But where there is no government to speak of, or where the government is very inimical to getting through to people, then you do need to work in some other way. For example, in Sudan, the government is being notoriously bad about getting any aid at all, deliberately withheld any international aid and food aid and so on from the south. And clearly the way to get to the south is not through the government, you have to do it in some other way. Somewhere like Afghanistan, where there's really weak government authority and so on, the NGOs have played a very important role in trying to get aid through.

DEEN: Is it easier for you to work with governments or with armed rebel groups?

STEWART: I suppose it is always easier to work with governments because they are officially recognized. It is always difficult to work with rebel groups and it raises some involvement and difficult political issues. But where people's lives are at stake and where rebel groups actually do control large areas, you have to work with them. You can't only work with governments.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Professor Frances Stewart, a board member of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. Professor Stewart, in huge countries like Russia, Indonesia, what can you do in situations like that? I mean, your group is presumably quite small and you may come up with all kinds of good recommendations but goodness knows the world has had plenty of problems with Russia and Indonesia in the economic area. Do you think that you'd be any more successful in the social field?

STEWART: Obviously our group has got no power. Our group is a bunch of scholars trying to make recommendations so what we can do is to talk to people and to try and get them to listen. As far as Russia is concerned, you have to talk to the IMF which in a way is moving away from this sort of policies we're advocating, trying to diminish the role of government, trying to diminish social expenditures in order to achieve budgetary balance and the net result is....

LITTLEJOHNS: And is that a bad thing?

STEWART: Budgetary balance in itself is not a bad thing but If you get to a situation in which people are getting nothing out of the government in which essentially there is no point in a way in being part of a society because the government is not giving them anything back – the government is not even paying wages, the government is not providing social services, and so on – then you are very likely to get a situation of violence and of economic collapse. And the end result is going to be much worse economy and a much more dangerous world than if you did something – allowed a bit of inflation, putting more international resources – and don't worry so much about budget balance. So I think

what we can do is say: what must you do? You must look for these inequalities in distribution of resources among different groups – in Russia, among different regions, discrimination against particular groups – and you must also worry about the total level of resources and see that governments are producing enough for their citizens, enough social security, and enough economic security and also political security to make a society really worth being a citizen of.

DEEN: Professor Stewart, how valid is the argument that in almost every ethnic conflict the root cause is economic – poverty, unemployment, jobs?

STEWART: I think that causes are complex always because clearly – I sit talking about a conflict as being ethnic, you're already presupposing that there's some cultural factors going on as well as the economic. I think the economic is very important. As I said, it's partly stagnation but it's partly the inequality among the different groups. The fact that in Rwanda, the Hutus felt the Tutsis were initially privileged and were really trying to bring them down; in Burundi, the Hutus have gained big inequalities among groups. Even today, even in Kosovo, that region has been deprived of social and economic and educational expenditures for a long time and that is the underlying cause of the situation. If we take Northern Ireland, the Catholics were persistently discriminated against in all economic areas – higher unemployment, less education, less jobs and so on. Less skilled jobs, no role in the government, discriminated against in every situation. It's more this discrimination than really the absolute level of poverty which counts because Northern Ireland wasn't a particularly poor society, not judged by what we're talking about in the Third World.

DEEN: If you pursue the same argument isn't it due to a shrinking economic pie?

STEWART: The shrinking pie does not help matters but the pie isn't always shrinking in all these cases. I mean, in Rwanda the pie had actually been increasing when this happened. Not fast enough to really bring the poorest people up into high levels. Clearly that would have been made a much, very much better situation. But the shrinking pie is not the whole story. It is who's getting the pie which really counts more than the

shrinking pie.

WURST: Going back to the sea of violence in your report you talk about the four scourges of humanity – war, disease, hunger and refugees. Let's touch a little on the war part of this. As you mentioned one of the few actors that makes money off these are arms merchants. You've got the case of Ethiopia and Eritrea where tens of millions of weapons are being shipped into countries that are dirt-poor. Is there any effort on your part in this study to look at the effect or the ways of controlling the flow of arms, both black market and world commercial sales, to try to short-circuit some of the violence involved in these conflicts?

STEWART: I'm not sure that one would short circuit it. I'm totally in favour of trying to control these things which are very, very difficult to control because as you know a lot of the arms are smuggled in. What you can control is at the more official level and one of the shocking things about the crises that we looked at was the extent to which international actors were actually officially supplying arms which would feed the conflagration. Maybe because it was part of the Cold War like in Afghanistan where you had arms from Russia, you had arms from Pakistan and you had arms from the US going in there officially. It was not even smuggled. Once you get into the smuggling arena then it's much more difficult to control. For example today, Afghanistan, where do they get the arms? By selling drugs illegally and buying arms illegally. That's a much more difficult thing to control but we would have got a long way if we controlled officially some of the aid that goes into many societies to finance the war for political reasons.

WURST: That is part of your programme?

STEWART: And that is part of the programme, yes.

LITTLEJOHNS: Would you say Afghanistan is perhaps the top of the list of the countries that have the biggest problems in CHE?

STEWART: It's such a horrible list. There are so many countries that you can think of and ...

LITTLEJOHNS: But there are all sorts of rather strange omissions. I mean I don't see in the list I have here Cambodia and I see included in the list Mozambique

which I thought was pretty well on the way to recovery now.

STEWART: Well the list is a 1980's list so this is not - so the fact that it's ... Let me say that our study is a historical one, largely, to look at what happened and what were the causes of historical conflicts. An analysis of what were the causes and what might be policy, preventative policies, so as to learn for the present. It does not necessarily address present conflicts, though it has relevance to every conflict I can think of today because in each conflict I can think of, there is this mixture of perceptions of difference among groups, of inequalities of resource access. And usually, but not always, it's stagnation of resources.

LITTLEJOHNS: You mentioned Iraq among the countries that are badly affected what about the social impact of sanctions on Iraq? Is that something that your group has addressed at all?

STEWART: In fact the paper on Iraq does address that very directly and shows that it's had some very bad effects on people within Iraq. Of course part of the Iraq problem is an internal one that the government is deliberately discriminating against the Kurds and part of it is an international one that the international community is having sanctions against Iraq which have had deep effects on human lives in Iraq. Possibly because the Iraqi Government is spending the money on something else. But nonetheless they certainly have had very serious effects.

DEEN: Speaking of arms is it true that food is being increasingly used as a weapon in some of these wars?

STEWART: In a sense yes, certainly. I think Sudan is a sort of a most extreme case where you find you have real famine situations. You have substantial amounts of food aid being supplied and that food aid goes to feed the army and not to the people who need it and also it is used in camps to persuade people to move out of their homes where they could not have their own subsistence and into camps where very often it's much easier to control them and so on. So, yes, I think food aid is definitely a weapon as well as being a resource which helps people survive in some context.

WURST: There have been a number of proposals over the years for organized, progressive, multilateral cuts in national defence spending - five percent over five years,

three percent over ten years, etc. UN Development Report ran that in their 1994 reports, which is one of the basis of yours. In your study do you see any chance of that sort of thing happening and do you agree or disagree that that kind of budgetary discipline would help relieve these emergencies?

STEWART: I think the budgetary discipline would be good. It wouldn't solve the emergencies because a lot of – the emergencies don't necessarily take off a lot of military expenditures. I mean some countries in emergency are spending very little officially on arms because they've got nothing to spend. They've got no official budget and if you look at Somalia or you look at Uganda, historically they were spending almost nothing officially. Of course they were spending a lot unofficially through smuggling, and so on and through unofficial resources. In Sierra Leone, through the sale of illegal guns and diamonds and so on, So I think, nonetheless, it would be a very good thing to produce defense budgets in that way whether you're going to achieve it. As you know, international compacts like that have not often been very successful but that's another matter. I think you could use conditionality more. In the ILO – we go back to the IMF and World Bank, they use policy conditionality a lot but in my view very often for the wrong objectives. And they could use it for peace, they could use it in order to get defense budgets down in order to get good regional and horizontal distribution resources and that would be a very productive use of conditionality.

DEEN: Has conditionality had a strong negative impact on vulnerable groups in countries?

STEWART: In many cases they've had a negative effect on vulnerable groups.

LITTLEJOHNS: Professor Stewart, do you think that there is likely to be a considerable increase in the future? We have spoken about the considerable increase in the past, but looking ahead, is this something that is getting worse and worse and worse?

STEWART: I think it's going to remain very serious. Whether it's going to escalate I am not sure. I think a lot depends on what is going to happen in Russia and Indonesia and that doesn't look at all helpful at the moment. So maybe on the whole it's a somewhat negative picture. And I think in Africa the generally very poor economic

outlook makes for a rather pessimistic view about emergencies in the future.

LITTLEJOHNS: I notice that the report that we have here says that in Africa the typical story has been one of slow deterioration of external conditions worsening in terms of trade, etc., which you have touched on before but what can you do about that?

STEWART: One thing the international community can do, and they're beginning to realize that, is write off debt.

LITTLEJOHNS: Which is what President Clinton recently proposed.

STEWART: Which President Clinton recently proposed. And I think that's essential and I would say particularly essential for war-affected economies. They should have their debt written off straight away. There is some sort of initiative for writing off debt but it's very grudging, very slow, very little and I think the direct write-off of debt would be one immediate thing they could do about that.

LITTLEJOHNS: But then a government only needs to start a local war and then say, look at this, write off our debt. That's the problem. The problem originated from governments in many cases.

STEWART: In many cases it does. But I don't think their motivation is to get their debt written off.

DEEN: You talked about debt but what about Official Development Assistance, ODA? There has been a marked decrease over the years.

LITTLEJOHNS: You have about five seconds to answer.

STEWART: There has been a marked decrease and what we need is a redistribution of what there is and of course an increase if one could get it.

LITTLEJOHNS: Professor Stewart, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest has been Professor Frances Stewart, a Board Member of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. She was interviewed by James Wurst of *In these Times* and Thalif Deen of *InterPress Service*. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for being with us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.